

Abraham Lincoln papers

Abraham Lincoln, Draft of Gettysburg Address, Hay Copy¹, [November 1863]

1 President Lincoln was invited to attend the dedication of a military cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the site of a decisive Union victory in July 1863. The main address had already been assigned to a famous orator, Edward Everett of Massachusetts. In his letter of invitation, the ceremony's organizer, David Wills, told the President: "It is the desire that, after the Oration, You, as Chief Executive of the Nation, formally set apart these grounds to their Sacred use by a few appropriate remarks" (David Wills to Abraham Lincoln, Nov.2, 1863). The speech was widely admired at the time and would become perhaps the best known of all Lincoln's writings. Edward Everett wrote Lincoln the next day: "I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes" (Everett to Lincoln, November 20, 1863).

There are five known drafts of the Gettysburg Address in Lincoln's hand. Three were definitely written out for persons requesting copies after the address had been delivered. Of the remaining two, at least one seems clearly to have been drafted before delivery on November 19, 1863. The other one, presented here, is referred to as the Hay copy, because it was given by Lincoln to his secretary, John Hay. There is strong evidence, including the tradition in Hay's family, that this manuscript was copied out for Hay at his request after the speech had been delivered. The changes appear much more in the nature of corrections of copying errors than compositional changes. (See Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 199-201.) But this copy, like the Nicolay copy (*q. v.*), lacks the important phrase "under God," which Lincoln was heard by reporters to say at the event, and which he included in the three copies he is known to have made afterwards. The absence of this phrase works to undermine the belief that it too was copied out later. For a full discussion of the five extant manuscripts of this famous address, see *Long Remembered: Facsimiles of the five versions of the Gettysburg Address in the handwriting of Abraham Lincoln* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1963).

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met here on a great battle-field of that war. We are met have come to dedicate a portion of it as the a final resting place of for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they have, thus far, so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the that cause for which they here gave gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom; and that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.